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SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 54.

SANITARY COMMISSION,
New York Agency, 823 Broadway,
October 22, 1862.

Applications for *material* to be manufactured into hospital clothing are constantly received by us. I regret to state that the Commission, after a short trial of the plan of furnishing material, finds it working so badly for its own interest, that it has been compelled to abandon it. We find that if we supply any Societies with material, we must supply *all*, and that to attempt this, would ruin our treasury in twenty days.

Nothing but the unbought, freely-given services of our people at home, both in furnishing *material and labor*, can avail to meet the vast demand for Hospital Clothing existing among our brave, suffering troops. If you recall the fact that we have 70,000 men in General Hospitals, 10,000 more in Regimental Hospitals, and perhaps 50,000 more in convalescent and other camps, you will see what a vast supply these 130,000 sick or invalid soldiers require. For you have only to think how much change of clothing, how much costly medicine, how much delicate food, how much wine and other stimulants, a single sick person at home requires, to appreciate the endless wants of 130,000 men in our hospitals and camps, one third seriously ill, one third really sick, and one third ailing. Nothing short of the free activity and free contributions of every family, hamlet, village, church, and community throughout the loyal States, continued as long as the war continues, can avail to meet this never-ending, always-increasing drain.

It is the little springs of fireside labor oozing into the rills of village industry, these again uniting in the streams of county beneficence, and these in State or larger movements,

flowing together into the rivers which directly empty into our great national reservoir of supplies, which could alone render possible the vast outflow of assistance which the Sanitary Commission is lending our sick and wounded soldiers. It is only necessary to give one statement to prove the absurdity of attempting to supply from our treasury the *material* of this home-labor for our cause. During the month of September, the Sanitary Commission *distributed daily* through its various agencies, West, East, and South, as well as can be now ascertained, not less than 26,000 articles, which, at an estimated value of 50 cents each, were worth thirteen thousand dollars, (\$13,000.) In a month of 31 days, as any one can see, this would amount to over \$400,000! and supposing only half the value to be in the material, you can see that it would cost us \$200,000 per month to supply the material which has, up to this time, been given us. This statement equally demonstrates the munificence of our contributors, in the past, and the utter folly of attempting to substitute our money for their free gifts. No! the moment the liberality and confidence of the homes and villages desert the Sanitary Commission, that moment its work of relief is ended.

Remember that the present destitution of the sick and wounded, which it requires such exertions on the part of the Commission to alleviate, is in spite of the comprehensive, energetic, and liberal exertions of the Medical Department of the Government. The admirable head of the Medical Department, Surgeon General Hammond, is laboring with most indefatigable zeal, and with most humane and enlightened ideas, to do all the resources of the Government allow him to do for the sick and wounded. But, although the expenses of his department will this year be over \$10,000,000, the field of care and want is too vast to be covered even by that expenditure. Then, with many experienced surgeons, how many more are necessarily too young and too new to their duties to understand the machinery, or execute promptly the generous intentions of the department? Add to this, that while inflexible rules are absolutely essential in all govern-

mental operations, they are inevitable causes of delay and obstruction; these great evils being less tolerable than utter chaos and irresponsibleness!

Thus, the *hospital fund*, the theoretical resource for supplying all the extra wants of the sick, (a fund which accumulates from having the ration of the sick soldier commuted and obtaining in money for the hospital the value of what, as a sick man, he cannot eat and drink,) is not available till a hospital has been at least six weeks in existence; and what are sick and wounded soldiers to do for clothing and delicacies meanwhile? Then, it is not available *at all* to field hospitals. There were, for instance, seventy-one of those field hospitals on the battle-field of Antietam, and not a penny of relief could they derive from any hospital fund. So, too, the Government has made some recent arrangements for supplying underclothing to the sick and wounded, over and above the yield of the hospital fund, but it takes on an average two weeks to get a requisition supplied. It is the same thing with a recent order for furnishing outer clothing to convalescents, "who have lost their clothing by the casualties of war," and who have been, sometimes, kept in bed weeks, because they had neither trowsers nor coat to get up in! The practical difficulties of carrying out the intentions of the Government in reference to so vast a body as an army of 130,000 invalids, produce immense suffering in spite of the utmost liberality and energy in the Medical Department and the Government.

Supposing only one eight of what is necessary and humane, in the vast requirements of the sick and wounded, to be unavoidably left undone by Government: to supply that deficiency would require a force in men and money, equivalent to one seventh of the present force and the present means of the Medical Department. That is, it would require at least five hundred men and a million and a half of dollars! Now, the Sanitary Commission has, perhaps, during the last year had what is equivalent to half that force of men, money, and capacity of supplies, at its disposal. It has done, therefore, at the best, only half what remained to be done! There

remains a sixteenth part of the preventable suffering of the sick and wounded unalleviated. On this sixteenth part, local and State associations have made some impression, but, owing to inconstant or ill-arranged methods, they have really embarrassed about as much as they have helped the Department. But the point to be steadily kept in view is that the sum of misery is confessedly beyond all that the Medical Department and the Sanitary Commission can do, with their present resources, and that it is not from any want of zeal or labor on their part that more is not accomplished, but simply because the work is larger than their means and instrumentalities. Do not wonder, then, at the stories of neglect, of suffering, of want, you hear from soldiers and from hospitals. They may, any of them, be true, and neither of us be to blame. You must not measure either the Medical Department or the Sanitary Commission by what they do not do—but by what they do! None can be so well aware as they of what remains to be done. If you would alleviate this misery and want, send the Sanitary Commission larger supplies. This is the only remedy you have. Make the supplies in money and goods *adequate*, and you shall have no reason to complain.

You would like to know what the Sanitary Commission is going to do with the money in its treasury, if it does not propose to purchase and supply materials? It is going to do what it has been busily doing for eighteen months past, at a cost of about \$200,000 to its treasury—*i. e.*,

1. Maintain constant inspection of camps for the dissemination of intelligence regarding the prevention of sickness.

2. Maintain the preparation and distribution of short, but thorough medical and sanitary papers for the guidance of medical and other officers.

3. Relieve the wounded on battle-fields, by supplying them with condensed food, stimulants, and means of preserving life, as at the battle of Antietam, when \$20,000 were expended in a few days.

4. Keep a corps of experts in constant circulation in all our hospitals, reporting defects, correcting evils, and doing their utmost to alleviate the radical sources of suffering.

5. Maintain the machinery for collecting and distributing the supplies furnished by the homes of the land—a business of great labor, expense, and wide agencies.

6. Afford special relief at our various “Homes” for sick and wounded men who are *in transitu* from camps and hospitals.

7. Make the general wants and condition of sick and wounded men a constant study, and strive by influences on Government, on Congress and the public, to secure such new laws, or general orders, or *to make such a public opinion* as will induce constant improvement in their condition.

You will see that the maintenance of all these objects does and must exhaust all the funds from every quarter at the command of the Commission, and that it is wholly in vain to think of supplying *material* to the societies, with such other expenses on our hands.

We have, then, only to urge again, the instant and earnest response of each and every home and sewing-circle, and soldiers’ relief association, to the urgent cry of the hospitals for supplies. You cannot make too instant, or too generous, or too long-continued efforts to meet the whole case! The homes of the land must protect the brave men who have left their comforts to battle for the liberties of their country. We have no right to luxuries, or extra comforts, while they continue half-clad or half-succored. Do not believe any stories which would discourage your efforts. All the noisy reports about the abuse of your gifts, the waste of supplies, the stealing by hospital stewards and surgeons, have the usual percentage of truth in them—they are just as true as, and no more so than, similar charges brought against any large body of men, or any great instrumentality. So far as the Sanitary Commission is involved, it denies their truth utterly, where its own agency or agents are concerned.

Very respectfully yours,

HENRY W. BELLOWS,

President and Chairman of the Executive Committee.

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NOTE.

The plan of the Relief Service of the Sanitary Commission, is—

1. To secure, as far as practicable, reserves of hospital and ambulance supplies, in order to be prepared to act with efficiency in emergencies.

2. To cover in its work, as far as practicable, the whole field of the war, dispensing supplies wherever most needed, to all in the service of the Union, without preference of State, arm, or rank, army or navy, volunteer or regular.

3. To study the whole field, by means of carefully selected and trained medical inspectors, in order to determine where supplies are most needed, and to watch against their misuse.

4. While administering to all pressing needs of the suffering, to carefully avoid relieving the officials in charge in any unnecessary degree from their responsibility, but to do all that is possible to secure his full rights to the soldier, unable to help himself.

5. To cordially co-operate, as far as practicable, with the hospital service of the Government, endeavoring to supplement, never to supplant it.

Societies, churches, schools, and all other organizations, the members of which cherish the principles upon which this plan is founded, are cordially invited to avail themselves of it in any action which they may see fit to take for the benefit of the sick and wounded.

1st. Contributing Aid Societies will send supplies when they see fit, through the channels established by the Commission.

2d. Corresponding Aid Societies must be devoted to the collection and preparation of supplies, to be sent to the soldier exclusively through the Commission.

3d. Branch Aid Societies are chartered by the Commission, to be established at points suitable for obtaining supplies, intended for distribution by the system of the Commission, from States or large districts. They must be responsible for the necessary labor and expenses of this duty, and must account exactly and punctually to those from whom supplies are received, and to the Commission.

As the Commission are trustees for the judicious distribution of the gifts of the people to the soldiers, the Branches are intermediate trustees for collecting, assorting, packing, storing, and forwarding the gifts. In emergencies, the Branch Societies are often called upon to assist the Commission even more directly in the performance of its duties.

Branches and Corresponding Societies will be supplied with the bulletins and all other publications of the Commission as soon as issued.

Commissioners under appointment from the President of the United States: The Rev. Henry W. Bellows, D. D.; Prof A. D. Bache, LL. D.; George W. Cullum, U. S. A.; Alexander E. Shiras, U. S. A.; Robert C. Wood, M. D., U. S. A.; William H. Van Buren, M. D.; Wolcott Gibbs, M. D.; Samuel G. Howe, M. D.; Cornelius R. Agnew, M. D.; Elisha Harris, M. D.; J. S. Newberry, M. D.; George T. Strong; Horace Binney, Jr.; the Right Rev. Thos. M. Clark, D. D.; the Hon. Joseph Holt; R. W. Burnett; the Hon. Mark Skinner; Frederick Law Olmsted.

For further information apply to

FRED. LAW OLMSTED,

General Secretary.

Washington, October 21st, 1862.